

Maine School Administrative District No. 75

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APR 26 2010

Town of Harpswell

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April 22, 2010

Board of Selectmen
Town of Harpswell
P.O. Box 39
Harpswell, ME 04079

Dear Selectmen:

I am in receipt of your letter of April 8, 2010, regarding the West Harpswell School closing issue. As you well know, the referendum that M.S.A.D. No. 75 held for the Town of Harpswell on the closing of West Harpswell School was a contentious affair. The Friends of Harpswell Education petitioned the court to stop the referendum, and the School District and the Department of Education were being accused of misrepresentation and of financial miscalculations regarding the dollar amount to keep the school open.

Given this political atmosphere, the District understood the referendum to be a Harpswell issue, to be decided by Harpswell voters. The District had made its decision. The Board had resolved that it was in the best educational interest of the children of Harpswell to consolidate the two elementary schools after answering the eleven questions posed at the beginning of the process. Consequently, we decided to provide the Harpswell voters with as much information as possible about the reasons for the Board's decision to close the school, and to respond to any questions voters had in the public hearing, through our Frequently Asked Questions publication, and in individual inquiries. The question of whether the \$219,000 cost of keeping the school open would actually increase a resident's taxes was not one of those questions.

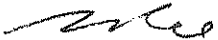
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Harpswell Board of Selectmen

Everyone knew that keeping the school open would cost Harpswell taxpayers more than if the schools consolidated. Even though the District's assessment to the Town will be less next year than this, it will still cost the taxpayers \$219,000 more to keep the school open, than not. You also know that Harpswell's taxes are a reflection of both the District's and the Town's expenditure decisions. Whether taxes would increase in Harpswell above the previous year was not solely determined by the District's assessment for education. In conversations with the other Towns' officials, we are made aware of the town issues that impact local taxpayers and drive taxes up. These were most evident at our March 16th meeting with the four towns.

During the period preceding the referendum, the District was engaged in a longstanding and well-publicized process to determine a budget for FY '11. That process included providing the Finance Committee with information, in public sessions, regarding the relationship between expenditures and revenues. Our Finance Committee meetings are open to the public and televised. At those meetings we provided the Committee with updated information on how State subsidy interacted with expenditures to determine potential assessments to the Towns. All of this was a moving target, dependent upon the Legislature's subsidy decisions and our level of expenditure. It was pointed out at those meetings that Topsham was going to see a major increase in assessment and Harpswell a reduction, given their valuations relative to those of the other District towns combined. Individuals and town officials interested in any aspect of the FY '11 budget development could inquire. Some did. We gave them any and all information asked of us.

I believe we were always responsive to Kristi Eiane's questions and concerns when she contacted us and will continue to work closely with her and all other town officials on matters of mutual concern. If in the future we are again engaged in determining the future of a school, we will provide all relevant information.

Sincerely,



*J. Michael Wilhelm, Ed. D.
Superintendent of Schools*